

# **'Letting the right one in': provider contexts for recruitment to initial teacher education in the United Kingdom**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigates relationships between context and recruitment in initial teacher education (ITE). process We do this through a 'home international' comparison of policies, provider context and recruitment processes in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. There is plenty of movement between these countries in the graduate labour market, but the contexts for teacher supply and demand vary in terms of: (i) scale, (ii) excess supply or demand, (iii) reliance of policy on market forces or bureaucracy and (iv) beliefs of policymakers about whether teaching is a craft or a profession. Recent changes in England and Wales have highlighted the importance of recruitment to ITE as a policy issue whilst also creating further points of comparison which are useful for research. We draw on trends in data on recruitment to teaching and in-depth interviews with gatekeepers to the profession in each country.

## **Acknowledgements**

We are grateful to Vivienne Baumfield, Greg Burke, Gail Dean, Helenrose Fives, Carmel Gallagher, Caroline Hoddinott, Anita Jenkins, Maureen McKenna, Gemma Riley and Geoff Whitty for their helpful suggestions and guidance on data during the framing and conduct of this research. We are also grateful to Geoff Whitty for comments on drafts of the paper. Responsibility for the selection and interpretations of the data lie entirely with the authors.

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# 1 Introduction

Since individual teacher quality is central to school improvement (McKinsey, 2007; Kane et al. 2011, Slater et al. 2012), the recruitment of new teachers is critical to the achievement of policy objectives on ‘raising standards’. Policymakers may respond to this imperative through measures they believe will improve the quality of new recruits to teaching, encourage ‘failing’ teachers to leave the profession, provide incentives to direct teachers’ effort and focus, or provide professional development to raise teachers’ capability. We focus on the first of these strategies and, in particular, on the recruitment of entrants to teaching.

The research was conducted in 2014-15 when the graduate labour market prospects in the UK were considered relatively buoyant and improving (CIPD 2014). Despite its policy salience, a review of research on teacher recruitment (Allen 2005) for the Education Commission for the States in the US concluded that there had been no adequate studies of what makes a difference in the recruitment of new teachers. Despite subsequent studies we judge that there is a place for fundamental research which maps out differences between recruitment processes in initial teacher education (ITE) which may be related to the context in which ITE is provided. To this end, we draw on interviews with Higher Education Institution (HEI) and School providers in each of the four jurisdictions within the UK to suggest a way of framing the problem which draws upon theory in social science.

In the next section we summarise policy differences within the four jurisdictions (England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales) and explain why a comparison of practice between these jurisdictions offers a fruitful way of understanding relationships between context and recruitment to ITE. We review existing evidence of recruitment practice in teacher education in the light of theoretical perspectives drawn from economics and sociology. We continue with a description and justification of our method, followed by our results and conclusions.

## 2 The contexts for recruitment to teaching in the UK: policies and outcomes

In this section we aim to demonstrate the policy salience of this study and establish a rationale for comparing recruitment practice in different parts of the UK. General labour market conditions are routinely recognised as affecting the quantity and quality of applicants to teacher training (Schalock 1979, Applegate 1987, Eide et al. 2004, Guarino et al. 2006). The gradual improvement in employment prospects for new graduates in the UK since the financial crash is shown in Table 1. Given these data we might expect a slight increase in difficulty in recruiting to ITE in the UK over this period.

**Table 1 Percentage of UK new graduates reporting that they are unemployed 6 months after graduation**

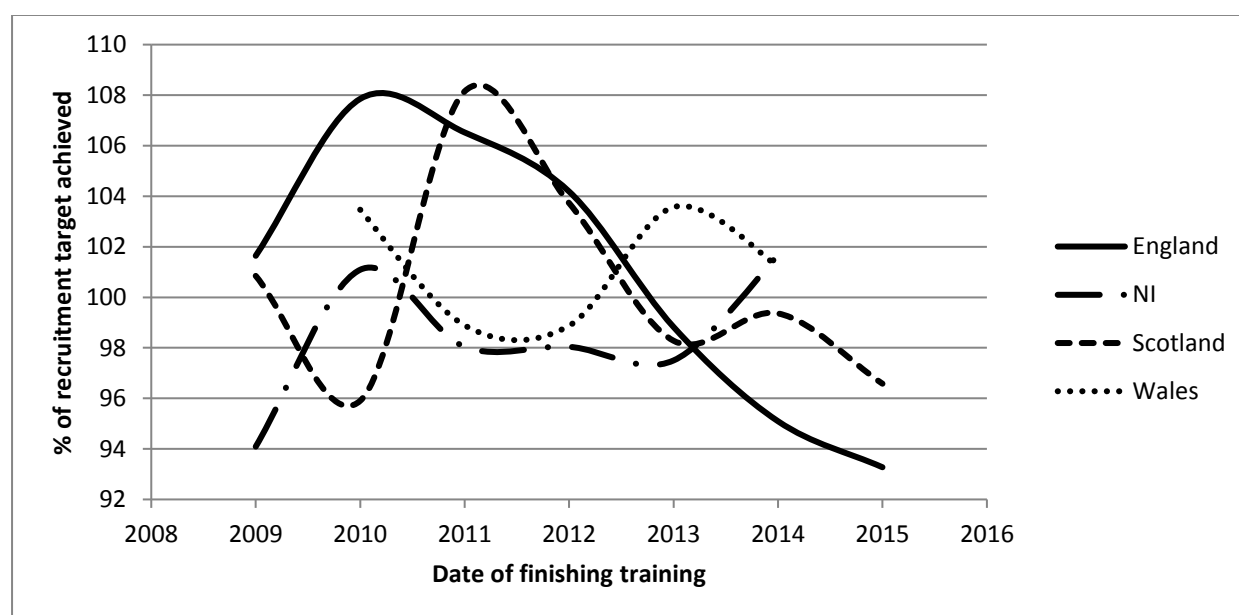
	2008	2009	2013	2014
Unemployment rate (%) for graduates	8.3	9.4	7.6	6.5

*Source: Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education Data provided by the Higher Education Statistics Agency*

The UK is conventionally regarded as a single labour market and there is a long history of graduate labour mobility (not least for new teachers) between the four jurisdictions. Moreover, the percentage of first time degree graduates unemployed 6 months after graduation did not vary between the four jurisdictions during this period (HESA 2015). Therefore, by comparing recruitment to ITE we aim to examine differences in perspectives and practice whilst controlling for general labour market conditions.

In England, the ratio of actual recruits to target levels for recruitment to ITE fell steadily after 2010 (Figure 1). Public concern about implications for schools and students has also noted even greater shortfalls in recruitment to ITE in some secondary subjects, including those prioritised by government (Husbands 2015, National Audit Office 2016). The trend in England contrasts with the other parts of the UK where recruitment to target fluctuated close to 100%. Although recruitment in Scotland followed a similar pattern to England between 2010 and 2013, the symmetry has disappeared in the past two years.

**Figure 1 Ratio of actual ITE recruitment to target**



Sources: National College for Teaching and Learning (2014) *Initial Teacher Education Census Data Excel Spreadsheets for 2014/15*. London, Department for Education (TSM is the Teacher Supply Model), Scottish Funding Council annual announcements.

The size of the school sectors in each jurisdiction might have some bearing on fluctuations in recruitment. In 2015/16, the total number of places on pre-service teacher education programmes in each jurisdiction: England 43,516 (NCTL, 2014), Northern Ireland 580 (DENI 2014), Scotland 3,437 (Scottish Funding Council, 2015), and Wales 1,630 (HEFCW 2014). However, the annual target for new teachers in England varied very little (between 1 and 3%) from year to year. Annual change in targets fluctuated by a bigger proportion in other jurisdictions (notably Scotland). Moreover, it is the distinctive trend in the rate of recruitment in England which is our interest in this paper.

Therefore, the comparison in Figure 1 encourages us to consider possible effects of differences in teacher recruitment *policies* in the four jurisdictions. Despite the devolution of administrative responsibility for education to the Scottish Office in 1885, teacher education was provided through HEIs in each of the countries in the UK throughout the bulk of the last century. More recent devolution of education policy to Northern Ireland and Wales means that there has been scope for each jurisdiction to develop distinctive approach to the recruitment of new teachers. However, it is England rather than the other jurisdictions which has moved away from the traditional model of HEI-led ITE. We summarise the emerging differences in four related themes.

First, whilst the other jurisdictions have used the term ‘profession’ to express their view of teaching, the government in England has turned to the term ‘craft’. One Minister of Education, (Gove 2010)

declared that 'teaching is a craft and it is best learnt as an apprentice observing a master craftsman or woman'. In contrast, politicians in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales have commissioned leading academics from other nations to review their provision of teacher education. Reviews of ITE commissioned by the Welsh Government, (Tabberer 2013, Furlong 2015) emphasised the importance of providing a strong research context for preparation for teaching. An influential review for the Scottish government (Donaldson 2011) explicitly eschewed the term 'craft' whilst advocating a conception of ITE as *professional* preparation requiring (p. 42) 'exploration of theory through practice'. A similar view of professionalism has been at the foundation of the partnership-based approach to teacher education in Northern Ireland since 1996 (DENI 2010).

Second, policy makers have adopted sharply different positions on whether schools or HEIs should take the lead in ITE. Even in 2006 McKinsey described the ITE system in England as the most diverse in the world. The Department for Education in England (2011) set out what it described as an agenda for reform of initial teacher *training* which asserted that schools should take a stronger role in the recruitment process. This 'School Direct' route was introduced in 2012/13 and positioned schools as lead providers with the determining voice in recruitment. By 2014/15 School Direct was responsible for roughly 30% of all ITE recruitment. One consequence has been that between 2011/12 and 2015/16 the number of HEI providers fell from 71 to 65 and the number of school consortia providing ITE rose from 107 to 150. Targets for recruitment to ITE in England had anticipated that schools would not fill all ITE places allocated to them (In 2012/13 total allocations had been 12% greater than target and in 2013/14 this was increased to 17%). However, the School Teachers' Review Body (Rice 2015, p.9) noted that only 61% of ITE places allocated to School Direct had been taken up. This shortfall was greater than expected. The Welsh Government (Lewis 2013) endorsed the Tabberer Review's advocacy of specialist 'training schools', whilst indicating a willingness to expand school-based teacher training if proposed changes in provision led by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) did not improve the quality of new teachers while also sanctioning a pilot of the school-based Teach First programme. The Donaldson Review in Scotland advocated a strengthening, rather than a weakening, of the role of HEIs in ITE on the grounds of providing new teachers with a strong intellectual challenge. The most recent review of ITE in Northern Ireland (Sahlberg 2014) did not recommend any fundamental change in the role of HEIs, saying only that the campus and school based strands of ITE should be 'carefully coordinated to create a coherent educational experience' (p. 31).

Third, there have been differences between the jurisdictions in the role of government in quality assurance and improvement. Whilst ITE programmes in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are regulated by the government, entrance to teaching in Scotland is governed by a professional body (The General Council for Teachers in Scotland) which monitors adherence to standards. Moreover, policymakers in England have increasingly entrusted quality enhancement (in recruitment as well as in course design) to competition between many diverse providers and applicants' ability to distinguish between better and worse providers. In contrast, policymakers in Wales have aimed to manage quality through consolidating provision in a smaller number of providers (Furlong 2006). Northern Ireland and Scotland have maintained quality enhancement systems that rely on relationships between HEIs and government bodies. These differences may reflect the size of each jurisdiction as well as government beliefs about the proper role of government in the labour market.

Fourth, England has placed much more emphasis on the value of recruiting new teachers with stronger academic credentials. Recruitment policy in England (e.g. Department for Education 2011) has aimed to increase the proportion of entrants to teaching with degree classifications of 2i or above. Wales has followed England's example in providing financial incentives for applicants to ITE from graduates with high degree classifications in shortage subjects, whilst placing less emphasis of the importance of degree classification in judging recruitment to teaching as a whole (Tabberer 2013). In contrast, the Donaldson (2011) report in Scotland and Sahlberg et al. (2014) in Northern Ireland made no comment on degree classifications. Donaldson was more concerned with the relevance of degree content to the

school curriculum, whilst Sahlberg et al. emphasised academic provision within ITE which would increase 'research literacy' and prepare for Masters level study.

This brief summary of recruitment patterns and policies raises the possibility that differences between the four jurisdictions in terms of who recruits to ITE (provider context) may be partially responsible for differences in rates of recruitment and may also be associated with differences between the characteristics of recruits. This motivates our qualitative investigation of recruitment processes used by different providers in each of the four jurisdictions. We now turn to the question of why the provider context for recruitment to ITE might affect the quantity and attributes of recruits.

### **3 Recruitment to ITE: the role of provider context**

In this section we present a frame in which to interpret our evidence. This section was developed in two stages. Before we undertook the research we conducted a search of literature which explicitly referred to recruitment in the context of routes into teaching. This yielded a fairly small number of studies which tended not to offer a theorisation of the role of the context in which ITE was provided. Once we had gathered our data we conducted a further review of literature pursuing themes which were suggested in the interviews. On this basis we suggest that the context in which ITE is provided may affect recruitment decisions either through beliefs about the desired characteristics of new teachers (at the end of ITE) or anticipated costs and benefits to the provider of accepting an applicant. This section considers each of these possibilities, referring to relevant ideas from economic and sociological analysis of recruitment to professions and the rather small literature on recruitment to teaching in different contexts.

#### **3.1 Desired characteristics of new teachers**

The context of provision of ITE might affect beliefs about the desirable characteristics of new teachers: through providers' beliefs about whether teaching is a 'profession' and whether provision is regarded as a preparation for all or a particular type of school.

##### *3.1.1 Profession or craft?*

Characteristics of traditional, 'occupational professionalism' have been identified by social scientists drawing on different traditions (see for example Matthews 1991, Freidson 2001, Gorman & Sandefur 2011). Two of these characteristics are most relevant to selection of applicants to ITE: (i) complex relationships between knowledge and actions which are not easily reducible to transferable rules; and (ii) technical autonomy in the conduct of work. The assertion that teaching is a craft concentrates on denying the first of these characteristics. The second characteristic has been threatened from a different direction. According to Evetts (2009), the emergence of the 'new public management' in public services has produced a new form of '*organisational* professionalism'. This is distinguished from 'occupational professionalism' principally by the replacement of 'technical autonomy' with organisational monitoring and evaluation of professionals' work against external standards. Evidence from comparison of teaching with other occupations (Rowan 1994, Ingersoll & Merrill 2011), and analysis of teaching tasks (e.g. Doyle 2006) have left room for debate about the extent to which teaching is best understood as an 'occupational profession' (Menter et al. 2010, Pollard 2011). We now consider some implications for recruitment to ITE of the assertion (Gilroy 1993, Barton et al. 1994, Edwards et al. 2002) that HEIs, but not schools, regard teaching as an 'occupational profession'

First, HEIs would believe they face a substantial 'adverse selection' problem (Akerlof 1970) when recruiting to ITE. That is, they will want to select individuals who will abide by professional ethics such that, even when they are not observable and regardless of how they are rewarded, they will use their knowledge and effort in the best interests of pupils (Sinclair & Picogna 1974, Schalock 1979, Kay-Cheng & Wah Kam 1990, Roberts & Dietrich 1999, Delfgaauw & Dur 2008, Georgellis et al. 2010, Uusiutu &

Määttä 2013). However, since teaching is largely in the state sector it is also likely to be relatively attractive to individuals seeking job security (Lewis & Frank 2002) and this will be an issue for all ITE providers. Therefore, we might expect HEIs to place more emphasis than schools on detecting intrinsic attitudes which will drive commitment towards pupils' needs. Second, HEIs would place more emphasis than schools on recruiting individuals who display a commitment to education as a vehicle for improving society (Knight et al. 1994, Jacobwitz 1994, Johnson & Reiman 2007, Bullough 2011, Evans 2011). Schools might place more emphasis on applicants' readiness to fit in with a school's culture or brand (in line with the predictions of 'organisational professionalism'). Third, if schools believe that teaching is a craft they are less likely than HEI tutors to believe that knowledge for teaching is complex and contingent (Buehl & Fives 2016) and will have more confidence that applicants' suitability can be readily judged relative to known attributes of a 'good teacher'. By contrast, HEIs would be expected to place more weight on trying to judge applicants' capacity for learning how to act responsively in different circumstances (Musset 2010).

### *3.1.2 Universal or context specific preparation*

Recruitment to ITE may attempt to select applicants to meet the needs of a wide range of schools or to select applicants who will fit in well at a particular type of school. The distinction between general and specific human capital provides one way of analysing this difference (Ost 2009, Xu et al. 2012, Jackson 2013). General human capital refers to a development in capacities for employment in any occupation (as in the assertion that TeachFirst develops capacities which will be valuable in blue-chip companies). Conversely, the benefits of human capital development may be specific either to an occupation (teaching), an organisation (a group of schools or an individual school) or a task (such as teaching a particular age group in a secondary school or a for a particular examination specification in a secondary school). The case for preparing all new teachers for linguistically and culturally diverse societies (Smyth 2013) presumes an occupational rather than organisational scope for human capital development.

Another strand of literature has suggested that applicants to ITE will be more effective if they teach in schools which are well matched to their prior characteristics: in terms of race (Villegas & Davis 2007, Dee 2005, 2007), socio-economic background (Haberman 1995, Sleeter 2001) or academic credentials (Clotfelter et al. 2006). This 'teacher matching' literature also provides some evidence for benefits of matching teachers and students by sex (Dee 2005, 2007). However, these studies generate tensions for policy and practice in the face of the role of schools in challenging inequalities, parental suspicions of male primary teachers and racism (Carrington & Skelton 2003). Moreover a study of primary age children in England (Carrington et al. (2008) found no association between the sex of teachers and children.

The literature on preparing teachers in pluralistic societies (e.g. Bryk et al. 1993, McLaughlin 2003, Nelson 2010) combines both strands. Once it is accepted that different communities within a society should expect children to be educated in ways that nurture those communities it makes sense for providers to specialise in recruiting individuals who are well matched to those communities and who will respond positively to ITE which is tailored to the needs of those communities.

The limited references to teacher-context matching in the literature on HEI-led recruitment to ITE (e.g. Moran 2008, Thomson et al. 2011) have suggested a broad commitment to matching by innate characteristics (race and socio-economic background), but with limited success. In contrast, analysis of recruitment to 'alternative' routes into teaching in the US (e.g. Stoddart 1991) have reported relatively high proportions of recruits from minority ethnic groups and targeting the needs of urban schools. Moran (2008) also reported that HEI tutors were sceptical about the feasibility of preparing recruits for a diverse schooling system, implying a firm belief in specific human capital. The importance of specific human capital in ITE is likely to be positively related to the diversity within a schooling system.

## **3.2 Costs and benefits of training**

Recruitment to ITE programmes may also be viewed as an investment decision by the provider: a decision in which they will weigh the likely costs and benefits they will incur if they accept an applicant. A small US literature (e.g. Levin & Quinn 2003, Stotko et al. 2007) has questioned the responsiveness to benefits and costs of local bureaucracies when recruiting new teachers in urban localities. This echoes the more general public choice critique (Buchanan & Tullock 1999) which might also apply in the case of recruitment to ITE. Larger and more bureaucratic providers might be less responsive to incentives.

Providers will expect to incur greater costs if they accept applicants they regard as more risky since these recruits would require greater support to reach required standards by the end of the course. In an HE-led programme these costs will be shared between the HEI and practice schools whilst in a school-led programme the costs will be borne largely by the school. Moreover, schools will also bear additional costs from effects on children of poor teaching by weak recruits. Therefore, we might expect the costs of recruiting a weak applicant to be weighted more heavily when schools rather than HEIs are leading recruitment. The benefits to the provider may come in several forms: income from fees; reputational effects; and easing future recruitment problems. Fee income is likely to be more important to providers when it is required to sustain core activity (such that there is limited capacity to reduce staffing costs if there is a shortfall in recruitment). This is more likely to be the case for HEI providers. Schools, rather than HEIs may ease *their* future recruitment of teachers through recruiting applicants who will become very good teachers.

These costs and benefits are subject to considerable uncertainty at the point of recruitment to ITE. For example, academic qualifications have been frequently reported as the main criteria for selection of applicants (e.g. Schalock 1979, Kay-Cheng & Wah Kam 1990, Moran 2008). However, graduate trainees' degree performance is weakly related to performance in ITE (Casey & Childs 2007, Caskey et al. 2011, Heinz 2013) and studies of teacher value-added in the UK (e.g. Slater et al. 2011) and the US (e.g. Pil & Leana 2009, Attebury et al. 2015) have not found an association between teachers' academic qualifications and their value-added. Moreover, interviews of applicants (which commonly form a part of the selection process) have, in other fields, been found to be weak predictors of subsequent success (Wise, 1987, 1997). Finally, new teachers improve at substantially different rates during the early years of teaching (Goldhaber et al. 2014, Attenbury et al. 2015). School providers which bear a greater portion of the costs of weak recruits and a greater portion of the benefits (if they subsequently employ trainees) face stronger incentives than HEIs to be cautious in the face of the uncertainty in predicting the trajectories of recruits to ITE.

### 3.3 Summary

Policymakers have justified the differences that have emerged between England and the rest of the UK on the basis of their beliefs about the validity of describing teaching as a profession or a craft. Whether this matters for recruitment to ITE depends largely on whether recruitment decisions in HEIs and schools reflect different conceptions of teaching either in terms of 'profession or craft' or different conceptions of 'teaching as a profession'. Whilst 'matching teachers to students' has been a prominent theme in debate over routes into teaching in the US, it has rarely been cited in the policy literature in the UK. The distinction between general and specific human capital and the implications for providers of factors affecting the benefits and costs of recruiting to ITE have also received little attention in the UK policy literature and our research examines whether these factors might matter a great deal in practice.

## 4 Method

In this research we examined evidence of relationships between recruitment practice and contexts for recruitment to ITE. Our evidence base comprises in-depth interviews with 29 HEI tutors, 24 teachers and 5 local authority officials responsible for the selection of applicants to ITE and first teaching jobs in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. We were interested in two kinds of evidence: (i) recruiters' attributions of relationships between their practice and the circumstances in which they

worked; and (ii) patterns of similarity and difference (or ‘linkages’ in the words of Ritchie et al. 2003) which were suggested by comparison of transcripts from recruiters working in different contexts. We judged that recruiters’ attributions would provide an insufficiently rich picture given that interviewees could be unaware of some contextual influences on their practice. We used triangulation, peer review, member checks and thick description as verification procedures (Creswell 1998, Anfara et al. 2002). For triangulation we interviewed more than one individual from most of the institutions in our sample and requested examples of documentation. Gathering different voices from the same institution proved more illuminating than documents. We used a reference group of senior policy makers and teachers responsible for recruitment in developing our interview schedule and establishing descriptive categories in our analysis. Our research team included academics with different disciplinary backgrounds and different experiences of policy environments and our internal review was supplemented by scrutiny from other academics at authors’ institutions. In addition, our analysis of patterns in the data was revised following review from academics beyond the team following presentations and discussions in 2015. The descriptions provided in the transcripts were “thick” in so far as they established interviewees’ experience, sense of role and purpose, relationship of role to practice, exemplars of practice and comparison of practice with others.

The sample of interviewees is set out in Table 2. Our interviewees were selected to uncover possible differences within and between jurisdictions. We therefore selected interviewees working at institutions with differing contexts within each jurisdiction (e.g. more and less selective HEIs and schools serving more and less advantaged localities by SES). We also included individuals with different types of responsibility in the recruitment process. Within England we interviewed tutors from six HEIs (three research intensive and three teaching intensive). Our sample of school-led ITE included teachers working in primary and secondary schools which were experienced different levels of difficulty in recruiting to first teaching posts. Our sample from Scotland included 4 Local authority (LA) officers as, following the Donaldson review of 2011, they have formal partnerships with HEIs in the preparation of new teachers. In reporting our data we indicate interviewee role, institutional type and jurisdiction.

**Table 2 The distribution of interviewees by jurisdiction and role**

	HEI	LA	Sec School	Prim School	Total for country
England	14	0	13	5	32
NI	6		1		7
Scotland	4	4	1	1	10
Wales	5	1	2	1	9
All countries	30	5	17	7	58

We drew on discussions with a group of policymakers and senior school managers (two half-day meetings) and our reading of the literature on recruitment to ITE in framing a set of issues to be explored through the interviews. We then devised an interview schedule with ‘headline’ questions and follow up prompts to probe interviewees’ reasoning and assumptions (Myers 2012). In addition, interviewees were asked to bring along any recruitment material (advertisements, criteria etc) which were used as interview prompts (see Hurworth, 2012). We aimed to reduce the scope for ‘social desirability bias’ (Engberg 2004, Gonyea 2005), through (i) questions (such as ‘what criteria do you use in your recruitment?’) which avoided any indication of what the interviewer thought might be ‘a good criterion’; (ii) questions which avoided signalling issues (such as using applicants’ tendency towards



critical reflection as a critical decider) which have been suggested in literature as important context related differences in teacher education; and (iii) requests for observations about the recruitment practice of colleagues (since interviewees were less likely to reveal aspects of their own practice which they thought might be considered questionable).

Each interview took place in a location chosen by the interviewees (normally their place of work). Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and all but one were recorded using a digital recorder. All interviewees were informed about the purpose of the project and assured that any data would be anonymised and treated in confidence and that they would have the right to withdraw at any time (BERA, 2011). The political sensitivity of ITE recruitment was reflected in one interviewee's reluctance to be recorded: this participant was happy to give consent to the interview but did not give permission for audio recording on the grounds that issues around recruitment to ITE were particularly sensitive in the current context of teacher education reform in the jurisdiction where he worked. Permission was granted to the researcher for making hand-written notes during the interview. These were subsequently typed up and used alongside the other transcripts. All of the original recordings were stored locally at each institution on password protected computers. The transcripts of each interview were anonymised and shared with research colleagues via the project's workspace.

We began our analysis by creating codes for the transcripts within each jurisdiction. Following Miles and Huberman (1994) these were descriptive/inferential codes. We agreed on twenty-two descriptive codes (see Appendix A) through on-line dialogue via our workspace, followed by a face to face meeting. A critical factor at this stage was agreeing on descriptors that used language applicable to different policy contexts. Agreement on the individual descriptive codes was facilitated by discussion about more general descriptions (the four headings in Appendix A) which were closely aligned to the sequence in our interview schedule. We explicitly considered whether interviewees' responses suggested different ways of regarding particular aspects of the recruitment process. Once we had agreed our frame we checked consistency in application using our remote workspace. As a first stage in developing pattern codes we examined participants' attributions of contextual influences. These concentrated on section 1 in Appendix 1. Discussion with academic peers encouraged us to reconsider our pattern codes in the light of an extended review of literature (Appendix 2). At both stages we used specific quotations in discussing relationships between pattern codes, descriptive codes and transcripts.

## 5 Results

For the sake of brevity we present our results with brief comments in the light of the previous section. Comparison of accounts suggested some similarities and some differences between recruitment in different contexts with regard to 'teaching as a profession' and 'universal or specific preparation?' Interviewees' direct attributions of contextual effects on their practice concentrated on references to the uncertain costs and benefits of providing ITE. With nearly sixty interviews it is not possible to convey complete pictures of individuals in our sample. Moreover, we do not assume that each interviewee held a coherent and singular perspective on recruitment to ITE. Our purpose was to examine similarity and difference in perspectives on recruitment and indications of ways in which these were related to provider contexts.

### 5.1 Profession or craft?

HEI tutors, teachers and LA officers were equally likely to declare the importance of identifying applicants who were passionate about teaching and had a 'strong work ethic'. One HEI tutor (England) believed they could 'see that passion in their eyes'. Another tutor (HEI, teaching intensive, England) referred to the importance they attached to applicants'

*understanding of the demands of primary teaching before you commit fully to the course.*

and a primary headteacher (England) asserted they were looking primarily for

*candidates who say we want to make a difference, ... a passion to actually impacting and steering and shaping young people's lives and primary school teachers*

The ubiquity of this kind of comment suggested that whatever the impact of 'new public management' on school environments (particularly in England), recruiters still believed they faced adverse selection and also believed they could overcome this problem through professional judgement.

*You need to know that these people are going to be organised and they're going to be resilient and are going to be able to be independent, (Secondary school co-ordinator, School Direct, England)*

Recruiters did not refer directly to the complexity of knowledge required for teaching but they did refer to the importance of degree qualifications and capacity of reflection. However, HEI tutors and teachers regarded degree qualifications as indicators of depth and relevance of subject knowledge rather than an indicator of capacity to make sense of complex knowledge demands.

*It's an indicator of the subject knowledge. It's not necessarily an indicator of pedagogic ability. (HEI teaching intensive tutor, England)*

The few references to general academic capability focused on coherent writing (within the course and in school):

*And if they can't really actually write at that level does that mean it's very difficult for them to progress in terms of career because they need to write self-evaluation reports, formal reports to the head teacher and so forth. (HEI Tutor, Wales)*

Teachers and HEI tutors also gave similar prominence to the importance of identifying which applicants were reflective. However, reflection may take different forms according to (i) beliefs about whether knowledge for teaching is complex and uncertain and (ii) whether teachers are expected to make and justify independent judgements about the quality of their teaching. Readiness to talk of 'reflective practitioners' appeared to mask differences which became more apparent following further probes:

*I saw one the other week in a primary school, he came out and why he got it was because he said, 'I did that wrong'. His reflection was immediate. (School Co-ordinator, School Direct, England)*

*(I am looking for) 'some sense of a scholarly understanding of the role'. (HEI research intensive tutor, England)*

The first comment located reflection in a rapid assessment of an action as 'wrong'. This school co-ordinator repeated the phrase 'reflection was immediate' when finishing her anecdote. It implies that judgement is fairly straightforward and focuses on teacher *actions*. The second comment implies a more considered assessment of an *approach* to teaching which takes the occupation rather than the organisation as its reference point. In our sample we found that HEI tutors in each jurisdiction were more likely than teachers to describe reflection in terms that presumed that knowledge for teaching was complex and uncertain.

## 5.2 Universal or specific preparation?

HEI tutors in each jurisdiction claimed they were preparing new teachers for any school. A minority also referred to ITE recruitment enabling ethnic and social mobility to serve what they regarded as a fair society. However, school co-ordinators frequently (though not universally) spoke of training teachers either for their own school or for a group of partner schools.

*Training your own and facilitating the needs of Head Teachers in the local community was the drive (for participating in School Direct). (School co-ordinator, School Direct England)*

*Interviewer: Does that (looking to recruit good NQTs) play any role in your motivation to take on trainees?*

*Interviewee: Absolutely, yeah, I think it's definitely a motivating factor (School Direct co-ordinator, England)*

This focus could affect criteria for recruitment through perception of the school's organisational needs or through seeking a match with the school's approach to educating children.

*I've sat in a number of School Direct interviews, ... and the first, discussion about each candidate was always orientated around can we see them fitting into this department? (HEI research intensive tutor, England)*

*Whether they would work well in the department I guess is whether they'd be personable (Head of Mathematics, Secondary School with School Direct, England)*

*You need someone who is engaged in, has a similar way of thinking about children (Teacher TeachFirst Wales)*

*To see whether the candidate is going to be suitable for our school or not..., because our pupils are unique (Teacher 1, Co-ordinator of teacher education, Secondary School with School Direct, England)*

One positive aspect of this focus on 'training your own' was that schools appeared to be more attentive to recruits' career trajectories beyond ITE. This concern was also apparent in Scotland where there is a stronger link than in England between institutional support for newly qualified teachers and their experience in ITE.

*One of our philosophies is grow your own, train your own, keep your own. (Local Authority officer, Scotland)*

Despite the public accountability evident in ITE provider league tables, HE tutors in England and Wales expressed less engagement with the subsequent trajectories of BTS and commented that they had insufficient access to the kind of evidence that would make this possible. As one HE tutor in Wales remarked:

*I wouldn't have any statistics for... after they've left us (HEI tutor, Wales)*

When HEI tutors referred to matching they cited the needs of a community that a particular type of school aimed to serve.

*We look for a commitment to being a Catholic teacher in a Catholic school, what that means. So, preparing children for the sacraments, for example, being a faith witness and participating in the liturgical and prayer life of the school; we look for them to have at least a commitment to that. (HE admissions officer, Scotland)*

Any form of matching at point of recruitment raises the question of whether ITE can prepare any recruit for any school: is it feasible to regard ITE as enabling human capital development that is general to all schools?. Recruiters' beliefs about possible development appeared to mirror assertions about matching at point of recruitment. HEI tutors (apart from those serving Catholic schools) and a minority of school co-ordinators claimed that by providing contrasting school experiences they could prepare new teachers for very different schools.

*We're making this very clear now, you will go into different schools, while you're here... you're going to be exposed to difference. (HEI tutor, NI)*

*Unless you can then, at the end, that finished product can go and teach in an inner city school, then we've not done our job. (School co-ordinator at suburban school, School Direct, Secondary School England)*

### **5.3 Costs, benefits and uncertainty**

Providers in all jurisdictions acknowledged that increasing recruitment created a tension between income and entry standards. Moreover, interviewees claimed they could judge when the benefits of additional income were more than offset by the costs of recruiting applicants who were less than adequate. However, this tension only became a material factor in recruitment for 'disadvantaged' providers: HEIs with less prestigious reputations and schools facing difficulties in recruiting new teachers

*Interviewer: Are you conscious, then, of working with people who've been recruited by others that you're thinking, well, I wouldn't have taken you on?*

*Interviewee: Absolutely, because we're under massive pressure to recruit and ...we need to get them in and absolutely, there is no doubt that there are some that fit on paper, that are saying the things that you would expect, but is your gut feeling it? No. (HEI teaching intensive tutor, England)*

*I don't know whether some institutions are driven by the finance side of, because funding is cut in schools and it could be seen as a lucrative income. (Co-ordinator of teacher education, Secondary School with School Direct, England).*

*I query why we recruit as many people onto teaching courses as we do when we don't need them all. So why don't we just push up the benchmark and just recruit the, bring the best people in? (HE Tutor Wales)*

HE and school providers were also mindful of reputational effects for future recruitment and for their standing within the profession.

*I think because of our name and the quality that has come from this school, when teachers get a job elsewhere, we want to carry that on. (Co-ordinator of teacher education, Secondary School with School Direct, England)*

Despite believing in their capacity to distinguish between marginal candidates, recruiters referred to two main sources of uncertainty: the challenge of balancing different criteria and the predictive power of the indicators they used. Recruiters referred to a wide range of criteria they used to judge applicants: (i) knowledge and understanding as indicated by academic achievements and functional skills; (ii) communication and engagement; (iii) character & motivation; (iv) life experience; and (v) reflection and ability to learn and adapt. This plurality creates a weighting problem. HE tutors in Wales and Northern Ireland described the scoring systems they were expected to use to address this problem. Most expressed the view that their own professional instincts were more likely to lead to good decisions than the strict application of a scoring system. Interviewees in each jurisdiction and each type of provider aimed to resolve the problem by using multiple threshold criteria (such as degree classification, literacy of applications, skills tests and school experience as a 'helper') to rule out unacceptable applicants and then relying on professional instincts which they found difficult to relate to their espoused criteria.

*It's that indefinable again almost, isn't it, did he have that X factor, no, he didn't have that, but even they, I don't think could put into words, but we all knew what we meant, (HEI tutor on recruitment decision taken with headteachers in School Direct provision, England)*

*It sounds corny but you get a feel for people, don't you? (Primary Headteacher, School Direct, England)*

*Really you do only need one question and a bit of a conversation to find out what you are looking for. [Yes] You sort of still have that instinctive, (HEI tutor Wales)*

*There's still people who are good, but you know the ones that really leap out and you think, yes, you'll make it. (HEI tutor N. Ireland)*

HEI tutors in each jurisdiction expressed greater scepticism about the relationship between academic qualifications and the knowledge required for teaching.

*The qualifications are really important, (Primary School Headteacher, School Direct, England)*

*Sometimes, people who are excellent at Maths, who've come with a First from Oxford or Cambridge, it goes back to this whole idea that they've always understood it, sometimes they don't understand those sort of basic principles, or they can't see it in different ways and explain it in different ways. \_ (HEI research intensive tutor, England)*

*They've just understood it from an instrumental point of view to pass their GCSE, to pass their A' Level and have done very well, but don't actually understand the underlying principles, then you've got issues really, but I don't think you can actually determine that in an interview (HEI research intensive tutor, England)*

Recruiters also stressed applicants' future ability to engage with children and to understand and choose between alternative teaching strategies. As noted earlier, this criterion was largely treated as independent from subject content knowledge and also acknowledged as difficult to predict. As with judgements about subject knowledge, HEI tutors tended to be more cautious about the indicators they could use.

*One of the biggest problems with asking candidates about their experience is they've never had experience really as a class teacher. (HEI Research intensive tutor, England)*

Nonetheless, most HEI tutors judged aptitude for pedagogy through applicants' interactions with adults during the recruitment process.

*(of an oral presentation) It gives the panel, who don't hardly speak at all, an immediate view of someone's preparation skills, understanding of selection of the piece, delivering the piece, communicating, without having any questions thrown at them, and, as I say, then they shortlist from that to the formal interview stage. (HEI tutor Northern Ireland)*

In contrast, School Direct co-ordinators emphasised their observation of how applicants worked with small groups of children during the selection process. Teachers had access to information that was more closely connected with the criterion for judgement, although this might have encouraged greater emphasis on what applicants could do now as opposed to what they could do after ITE.

Schools faced stronger incentives than HEIs to emphasise what they referred to as 'classroom readiness'. These incentives were created by additional costs that discouraged schools from accepting 'adequate' applicants. First, in a traditional route a school can more easily mitigate the effect on children of a struggling recruit (ultimately by telling the provider that the recruit needs to be moved). In these circumstances, teachers spoke of their primary allegiance as lying with the children, whereas HEI tutors referred to their primary allegiance with beginning teachers. One referred to this as a 'moral obligation'. Second, whereas the burden of a struggling recruit in a 'traditional' route is shared between the HEI and the school in a School Direct route the extra workload falls mainly on teachers in that school

*(in School Direct) You're placing them in a department for a significantly longer period of time than you would on an all PGCE and that department is taking more responsibility for them, that first thought that's going through their mind is, is this person going to bring shedload of extra workload. (HEI research intensive tutor, England)*

*We haven't got time to get involved with organisations that don't send great people through Headteacher, Primary School, School Direct, England)*

Therefore there was an inherent logic in schools being more inclined than HEIs to 'play safe'.

*Head Teachers can be more rigorous in terms of their expectations of the degree. We may accept a 2:2 on our PGCE route, but a Head Teacher on a School Direct alliance might be very, very strict that they only want 2:1 and above. (HEI teaching intensive tutor, England)*

*Traditionally people who've perhaps worked in industry and are coming out and wanting to sort of get straight in there, they've got perhaps a few more years of experience, have got the confidence to be there straight away in the classroom (Head of Department, School Direct, England).*

*I've interviewed some real quality candidates for salaried routes in particular, but the schools don't want them because they have the person that they want and who is their HLTA as part of the candidates, so they will go for that person who, at times, has been weaker at the interview process. (HEI teaching intensive tutor England)*

Regardless of whether the criteria being employed are, in fact, good predictors of subsequent teacher quality, schools tended to emphasise immediate rather than future capability and teachers used the phrase 'classroom readiness' to convey this emphasis. HEI tutors appeared to give more weight to potential for development than readiness to cope with the organisational demands of the classroom.

*Some people who are quite, you know they want to show that they are confident because they are the first person. Yes, sometimes confidence is good but sometimes the person holds back is a little bit of everything (HEI tutor, Wales)*

*We're always looking for potential, we're not looking for a finished article. (HEI research intensive tutor, England)*

## 5.4 Summary

The shift towards school leadership in recruitment to ITE in England has occurred in a policy context that has been variously described as 'organisational professionalism', 'performativity' and 'standards driven'. This contrasts with education policy elsewhere in the UK where the idea of occupational professionalism has been reinforced by academic-led policy reviews commissioned by governments in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Our HEI interviewees in England had maintained an 'occupational professionalism' perspective similar to their colleagues in HEIs elsewhere in the UK. HEI tutors claimed to use similar criteria, similar indicators and similar processes. Decisions about marginal applicants were related to providers' market position rather than professional perspective.

Schools that accept government quality standards for teaching and which closely monitor and evaluate teacher performance should be less concerned than HEI tutors that new teachers might exploit classroom autonomy to the disadvantage of children. However, the School Direct co-ordinators we interviewed were as emphatic as HEI tutors about the importance of applicants' work ethic and passion for working with children. We did, however, find some indications that HEI tutors were more likely than teachers recruiting for School Direct to believe that knowledge for teaching was complex and that developing this knowledge could be arduous and troublesome. HEI tutors were more likely to refer to looking for signs that applicants had the capacity and appetite for profound learning from the experience of teaching.

However, this apparent difference in epistemological beliefs looked more complex in relation to the trust that recruiters placed in the indicators they were using. HEI tutors and School Direct recruiters used degree classification as an indicator of subject knowledge, but many HEI tutors said they were sceptical of its predictive value (in line with available evidence). Conversely, HEI tutors relied on engagement with adults during the recruitment process as an indicator of engagement with children, whereas School Direct recruiters relied on applicants' engagement with pupils during the recruitment process. Moreover, all recruiters expressed much more confidence in their ability to judge applicants than we might have expected either from their reservations about available indicators or the evidence base on recruitment processes. There were signs of confidence bias in beliefs about the efficacy of professional judgement.

We also found that the School Direct recruiters we interviewed tended to be looking for an organisational match between applicants and their school: either in terms of 'fitting in' with the school organisation and ethos or sharing the school's perspective on what schooling should be like. Teachers explained this emphasis in relation to their expectations that ITE recruits would progress to teaching jobs either in that school or one of its partner schools. Most of the HEI tutors we interviewed expressed their purpose as preparing recruits for a diverse schooling system. Those HEI tutors who had participated in interviews for School Direct claimed that some applicants were being rejected from one school where they 'did not fit in' when they would have been welcomed as 'strong candidates' at another nearby school.

Finally, and perhaps most critically, schools faced greater costs than HEIs if they accepted a marginal candidate who did not live up to expectations. Therefore, they had more incentive than HEIs to be cautious. Moreover, schools placed more weight on what they perceived as applicants' 'classroom readiness' at point of recruitment and less weight on capacity to improve.

## 6 Conclusion

We examined relationships between the context and recruitment to ITE. Our investigation was prompted by two observations that are now well grounded in evidence from different countries: the quality of teachers dominates the effect of schools on students' achievements and the quality of the teaching force is shaped in part by who is recruited. 'Home international' comparisons between the jurisdictions of the United Kingdom enable a perspective on whether the process of recruitment to ITE might be important for the subsequent quality and character of the teaching force. Policy makers in England have recently shifted the balance of responsibility for recruitment from HEIs to schools. Policy makers in Wales are considering a similar change, but at present their recruitment is firmly in the control of HEIs. Recruitment to ITE in Northern Ireland remains firmly in the control of HEIs whilst policymakers in Scotland remain committed to its partnership of HEIs and local authorities in recruiting to ITE.

To some extent these differences can be seen in comparisons of policy statements and associated flows in numbers and characteristics of recruits to ITE. Our primary purpose was to improve capacity to interpret these data through a deeper understanding of the recruitment processes that HEIs, schools and local authorities were adopting in different policy contexts. We have used our in-depth qualitative data to suggest a way that researchers, policymakers and practitioners could frame the issues they are addressing. First, recruitment practice will reflect recruiters' perceptions of teaching as an occupational profession, organisational profession or craft (and, therefore, their beliefs about adverse selection and their epistemic beliefs about knowledge for teaching). There may be tendencies towards particular forms of bias such as confidence in the efficacy of professional judgement. Second, recruitment practice will be affected by the degree to which recruiters think of ITE as a universal or specific preparation and in particular whether they treat it as preparation for an organisation or a profession. Recruiters' perceptions in relation to points one and two can be understood in terms of how they position themselves in relation to prevailing policy towards ITE. Third, recruitment practice will be affected by the costs and benefits that accrue to the provider (as opposed to the profession).

This way of framing the problem suggests several predictions which are consistent with available evidence about recruitment to ITE in the UK and the evidence we have presented here. First, a shift from HEI-led to School-led recruitment to ITE will strengthen a move towards organisational professionalism as school networks develop distinctive approaches to education. If schools are licenced to lead ITE on the basis of endorsement from inspections and pupil examination results there is a risk that preparation for teaching will become biased towards the needs of 'successful' schools. Second, the ratio of recruits to target for ITE will be lower if responsibility for recruitment is shifted to schools: schools will be cautious in their decisions because they bear a greater share of the risk from applicants who do not fulfil expectations and schools will reject applicants who will not 'fit in' with them but who might fit in elsewhere. Third, school leadership of recruitment to ITE is likely to result in greater weight being given to evidence of applicants' engagement with pupils and stronger emphasis on trainees' subsequent employment trajectories.

Policy plays a strong (though not necessarily) determining role in shaping the context for recruitment to ITE and possibilities for improving the teacher workforce through recruitment have become salient for policymakers as the importance of the individual teacher has become more fully recognised. Policies need to be judged not only their prospects for creating positive effects but also in terms of the unwished for problems that any policy change necessarily creates. Policymakers, like HEI tutors and teachers, would do well to recognise how hard it is to 'let the right one in'.

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